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EMBARRASSING MOMENTS

Continued from page 5

announcing Mr. Bryan's appearance there that evening—my evening, as I had supposed it to be. I did not know exactly what to do. I knew perfectly well what would happen to me if it came to a hand-to-hand contest for possession of the stage. Physically, with Mr. Bryan and myself left to decide the matter for ourselves, after the fashion of a pair of bantam white hopes, I felt that I might have a fairly good chance to win out; for I am not altogether without brawn, and in the matter of handling a pair of boxing gloves am probably quite as expert as the Secretary of State; but nobody outside of Matteawan would be so blind to commonsense as to expect an audience anywhere either to stand neutral or to indulge in a policy of "watchful waiting" with such a contest going on on the platform.

My first impulse in the circumstances was to get out of town as quickly and as quietly as I could, and forget that there was such a place as Daytona on the map; but a careful scrutiny of my letter of instructions reassured me. The date, according to the supreme managers at Atlanta, was clearly mine, and I decided at least to go down with colors flying. I have never run from my own lithographs, and I saw no reason why I should flee from Mr. Bryan's. I got in touch with the local committee as soon as possible, and soon had at least the solace of companionship in my misery. They were as upset about it as I was.

"But, Mr. Bangs," protested the chairman, almost with tears in his eyes,—his voice was full of them,—"you aren't due here until tomorrow night."

"I don't see how that can be," I replied unfeelingly. "You know perfectly well that I am not twins, and only twins can appear in two places at once. I am to lecture at Miami tomorrow night."

I handed the gentleman my letter of instructions, confirming my statement. It was all down in black and white.

"It's a perfectly terrible situation," said the chairman, tears even springing from his brow, "and I'm blest if I know what to do!"

THERE is only one of three things to be done," said I. "The first is to let me sit in the audience tonight and listen to Mr. Bryan, collecting my fee on the ground that I have earned it by holding my tongue—which is some job for a man primed with unspoken words. The second is to let Mr. Bryan and myself go out on the platform and indulge in a lecture Marathon, he at one side of the stage, I at the other, talking simultaneously, the one that gets through first to get the gate money. The third and best is for you to telegraph Mr. Bryan and find out direct from him what his understanding is as to the date."

The first or the last of the propositions would have suited me perfectly; for I should have been delighted to listen to Mr. Bryan whether I was paid for it or not—and most assuredly had Mr. Bryan himself laid claim to the date no power on this earth could have lured me into a dispute over its possession. I am too fond of this life to risk its uncertain tenure for the brief glory of an hour on a preempted platform.

I am glad to say that before dusk the complication was cleared off; for, the third alternative having been accepted by the committee, Mr. Bryan was caught on the wire, and replied instantly to the effect that he was to lecture that night on some such subject as "The Curse of Wealth" at Palm Beach, where many sufferers from that particular blight are annually gathered together in large numbers. The skies immediately cleared, and I went out that night before a packed house, the unwitting beneficiary of widespread advertising on Mr. Bryan's behalf, and enjoyed myself very much; although as I sped along I could "spot" here and there in the audience individuals who, having come to hear Mr. Bryan, like Rachel weeping for her children, "refused to be comforted."

My only lasting regret was that my contract did not call for the payment to me of fifty per cent. of the boxoffice receipts. I have no doubt there were people there that night who thought, and possibly still think, that I stole that audience. And perhaps I did; but I was no more responsible for the theft than was poor little Oliver Twist, who found himself at unexpected places at unlooked for hours through the efforts of those "higher up." I may add too in all sincerity that if Mr. Bryan himself feels, or felt, in any way aggrieved over what he might call my "unearned increment" in listeners, I will gladly exchange fees with him. I will unhesitatingly, at his request, and by return mail, send him my check for the full amount

received by me on that somewhat nervous occasion if he will send me a postoffice order for the amount received by him the evening after.

EMBARRASMENTS of a less poignant character frequently arise in the matter of unexpected calls for service, for which the public generally assumes the platform speaker to be necessarily always prepared, but for which as a matter of fact no amount of preparation could adequately fit any man built on the old-fashioned plan in respect to his nervous organization. One of these affairs came into my experience a decade ago, when, crossing the Atlantic Ocean on one of those high-roller ocean greyhounds, I was drafted by an overzealous committee of arrangements to preside over one of those impromptu entertainments got up on shipboard for the benefit of the widows and orphans of those who go down into the sea in ships. To these more than worthy enterprises gratitude for benefits received has always made me a willing contributor; but to participate in them has ever been a trial. I would rather lecture before the inmates of a deaf and dumb asylum.

The company aboard a transatlantic liner is always, to say the least, "mixed" in the matter of nationality; and, while one might be willing to "make a stab" at being witty before a gathering all English, all French, all German, or Pan-American, were unto him who vaingloriously attacks the risibles of a multitude made up of all these widely varying racial elements! Their standards of humor are as widely divergent as are their several racial strains, and one might as well try to sit on four stools at once with perfect composure as expect to find the "Chair" under such conditions comfortable. One has to acquiesce in such demands, however, or be set down as disagreeable, and when the committee approached me in the matter they received a much readier yes than I really wished to give them.

THE night came, and I found myself at the head table in the dining saloon working for dear life to keep the thing going. There was a pretty slim array of talent, and from one end of the program to the other there was nobody to hang a really good joke on, even if I had had one to hang. A chairman can always be facetious at the expense of distinguished people like Chauncey M. Depew, Henry James, or Mr. Caruso, and "get away with it"; but the obscure amateur cannot be handled with brutal impunity. I think I may say truthfully that no man ever worked harder at the pumps of a sinking ship than I did that night. And to make matters worse there was a heavy rolling sea on, and, while I never suffer from seasickness, the combination of motion and nerves made me uncomfortably conscious of an insurmountable midst as I forged hopelessly ahead.

Finally, however, there came a rift in the cloud of my despair. A pleasant little cockney ballad singer who was coming over to America for a season in vaudeville volunteered to sing a ballad. It was well sung, and most pathetic. It depicted in dramatic fashion the delirium of an old British veteran, who, as the hour of death approached him, was fighting over again in fancy the battles of his youth. The refrain of the ballad was, *Bring me the old Martini, and I shall die in peace!*—referring of course to the rifle that for a period of years up to 1890 had been the official weapon of Tommy Atkins. I made the most of so obvious a lead, and before introducing the next number on the program thanked the singer for his dramatic rendering of so fine a story.

"But, my friends," said I, "that ballad saddens me in more respects than one. I have long believed in international brotherhood. In common with my friend Conan Doyle and others who have advocated the hands stretched across the sea, I have been in sympathetic accord with the idea of universal brotherhood; but now and then certain little things crop up that, insignificant in themselves, show us none the less how radically far apart we really are. This splendid old British warrior calling for his Martini is a case in point, and I am sure my own compatriots here tonight at any rate will realize the vast gulfs of separation that exist between the Britons and ourselves when I ask them what they would bring to a dying American soldier, delirious or otherwise, if he were to call for a Martini."

The point took, with the Americans; but the others, charming Frenchmen, delightful Germans, cultivated Englishmen, stared at me in stolid silence, and one or two of them shook their heads as if bewildered. It was a hard situation, and I slammed the

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